MISPERCEPTIONS CLOUD STUDENTS’ OPINIONS OF AGRICULTURAL CAREERS

— by Teddee Grace —

Colleges of agriculture along with agribusiness are challenged today to halt the decline of student enrollment in agricultural curriculum. A survey of high school students published recently by the Farm Foundation of Oak Brook, IL indicates that there are many obstacles to overcome. However, with vigorous efforts, capable and bright students can be attracted to agricultural curriculum of the nation’s land grant universities. But it won’t be easy.

All students surveyed, even those intending to major in agriculture, hold many misperceptions about agriculture-related careers and majors, according to the study conducted by the American College Testing (ACT) Program. Iowa City, Iowa, administrators of the ACT tests used to determine college eligibility of U. S. high school students. Survey results reveal those students intending to major in nonagricultural fields have a particularly limited awareness of agricultural colleges, agricultural majors and agricultural careers.

The survey reveals that individuals employed in the profession of interest exert the strongest influence on college major and career choices. Fathers, high school teachers and mothers rank second, third and fourth respectively while newspapers and magazines have some influence. Those surveyed said personal interests and personal happiness were more important than money or income potential in choosing a major or career and most students made their choices during their junior year.

Two samples of ACT-tested high school students were randomly selected from the more than one million juniors and seniors who completed the ACT Assessment during the 1987-88 academic school year. Both surveys were selected proportionally, by state, to be representative of college-bound high school juniors and seniors nationwide. Sample One consisted of 810 students who had reported agriculture or a related area as a college major. The 2,549 students in Sample Two had selected other majors or were undecided.

Major findings reveal that more than two-thirds (70 percent) of all respondents either disagreed with, or were not aware of, the contention that graduates with agriculture-related majors often pursue business careers and 71 percent disagreed with, or were not aware of, the contention that such graduates are sought after by many multinational corporations.

The majority of students thought most agriculture-related careers involved working outdoors and were very dependant on weather conditions and 49 percent of the nonagricultural group thought most agriculture careers required extensive knowledge of farms and farming. About 70 percent of the nonagricultural group agreed with, or were uncertain about, the contention that job opportunities in agriculture-related careers were declining and that most agriculture-related careers involved or required manual labor.

For Report

Copies of the Executive Summary of the findings of the survey of students can be obtained from The Farm Foundation, 1211 W. 22nd Street, Suite 216, Oak Brook, IL 60521. Ask for High School Student Perceptions of Agricultural College Majors and Careers, April 1989.

Have You Read —


Do You Have A Copy Of —

Agricultural-Food Policy Review, Agricultural Economic Report Number 620 of the Economic Research Service, USDA? The book is an excellent source of information helpful in understanding agricultural policies and for “looking to the future for new agricultural, environmental and rural development issues.” This nearly 400 page book has three major sections—U. S. Agricultural Policies in the 1980s, Current Policies and Programs, and Emerging Issues. Copies are available for $12 by writing to ERS-NASS, P.O. Box 1608, Rockville, MD 20849-1608.

Did You Know That...

- Since 1979 the enrollment in the University of Illinois College of Agriculture has dropped from 1,752 students to 1,174.
- Over the last ten years the percentage of males and females in the college has remained about the same with 64% men and 36% women.
- In the fall of 1989, one third of the freshman class had a farm background.
- Of the fall 1989 freshmen 60% had no high school agriculture classes and 23% had 4 years of high school ag. The remainder were evenly split between 1, 2 and 3 years of agriculture classes.

—Taken from Fall 1989 Nabor Nubbins.
Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. 3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS Conducting a project of this magnitude required the cooperation of numerous individuals and groups. Agriculture careers; most of what these students did know appeared to have come from media sources, particularly television. In addition, most of the students . . . appeared to have had many misperceptions about agriculture-related careers and majors. . . (Farm Foundation, 1989, p. ii). Agricultural career options go well beyond farming and ranching. If you love the idea of working with crops, animals and resources that contribute to the . . . Eight Types of Agricultural Careers. Agriculture is big business. The industry has been around for thousands of years. According to the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) the agriculture industry and related industries provide 11% of jobs in America. Presentation on theme: "Agricultural Careers. At the completion of this unit, students will be able to: A. List 8 Major Career Areas in Agriculture B. Research salary, education, and job descriptions for careers in Agriculture C. Match agricultural careers with skills and interests D. Set "S.M.A.R.T" goals relating to their future employment E. Identify Agricultural Pathways offered at the High School... 9 Agriculture Processing Involves processing and distributing food * Examples include: Butchers Grain Mills Egg Processing Milk Plant/Cheese Factory etc A. List 8 Major Career Areas in Agriculture.